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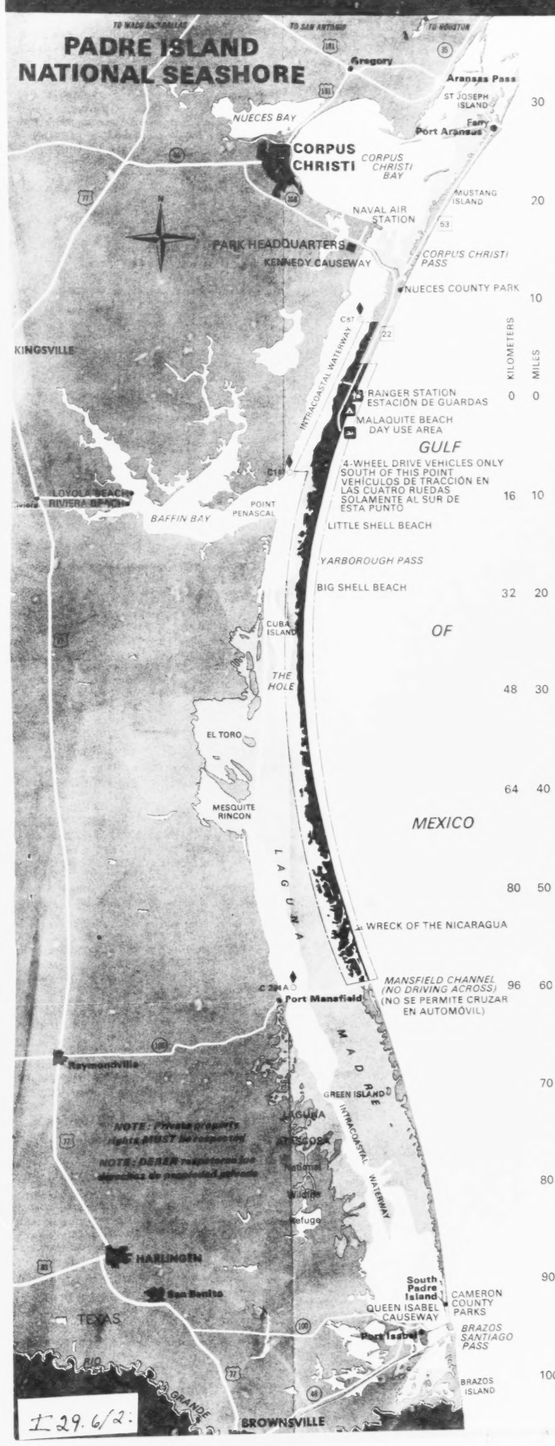
Padre Island

National Seashore
Texas

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



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Profile of a Barrier Island

Padre Island is one of a chain of islands that stretches along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of the United States from Maine to Texas. These are barrier islands, so-called because they guard the mainland from the direct onslaught of storms. Like all barrier islands, Padre Island is a dynamic place where you can witness change -- change wrought by the gentle touch of breezes, by the relentless crashing of waves, by the rhythmic coming and going of the tides, and, most dramatically, by the violent battering of tropical storms and hurricanes. The many environments of Padre Island -- beach, dunes, grasslands, and tidal flats -- are shaped and reshaped daily in response to these natural sculptors. The world of Padre Island is a natural world of change and extraordinary variety and richness. It is the world of the barrier island.

Activities Ashore and Afloat

Driving is one of the many ways people enjoy the seaside pleasures of Padre Island. All vehicles can travel the paved entrance road, North Beach, and the first four miles of South Beach, until the four-wheel drive sign. After that point, four-wheel drive vehicles can continue "down island" all the way through the soft sand and slippery shell beaches to Mansfield Channel, 60 miles from the end of the pavement. Talk to a park ranger about what to expect before going down island, and be sure to carry emergency tools, extra gas, and plenty of water. The noise of the surf may drown out the noise of your engine; be cautious when approaching others. The speed limit on the beach is 15 mph unless otherwise posted. The dunes, grasslands, and tidal flats are off-limits to vehicles, as well as the Malaquite Beach area. All vehicles must be state licensed and Texas highway laws apply to the beach.

Hiking on the beach can be slow going but rewarding, especially if you like **birdwatching** or **beachcombing**. Birders may spot many of Padre Island's 350 native bird species. Beachcombers may collect shells and other treasures of the sea; however, live animals and objects of historical or archaeological value cannot be taken. Metal detectors are prohibited.

Warm Gulf waters and hot Texas sun are ideal for **swimming** and **sunbathing** much of the year. Swimming is permitted all along the beach. Never go in the water alone, and beware of dangerous currents, undertows, the blue, bubble-like Portuguese men-of-war, and stingrays.

Boating, waterskiing, and **sail surfing** are popular in the Laguna Madre, accessible from Bird Island Basin. Boat launching is not permitted on the Gulf side of the island. Boaters should carry nautical charts and keep an eye on the weather and other boaters.

Fishing is an all-season sport on Padre Island. Surf fishermen commonly catch redfish, speckled sea trout, black drum, and whiting in the Gulf, while in the Laguna Madre they also pull in sheepshead, croaker, and flounder. A Texas state fishing license with a saltwater stamp is required.

Camping is available year-round at the Malaquite Beach campground, which has restrooms and a dumping station. There are no hookups. Primitive camping is allowed at Bird Island Basin and all along the Gulf Beach except in the Malaquite Beach area. Campfires are permitted and must be kept under control and away from dunes and grasslands vegetation. Put fires completely out before burying them. Campers must stay on the beach and not in the dunes.

Naturalist programs during the summer are free of charge and open to the public. Be sure to stop in at the Malaquite Visitor Center for further information. The visitor center is open seven days a week, 9-6 in summer and 9-4 the rest of the year.

Please be alert for nesting sea turtles! Padre Island National Seashore is involved in an intensive effort to re-establish a nesting site for the critically endangered Kemps Ridley sea turtle. If you spot any sea turtles, especially live ones that appear to be nesting, please take careful note of your location, leave a marker, and report to a ranger as soon as possible.

FIRST AID is available at the Ranger Station. If you need assistance, stop by the Ranger Station or call 949-8173. For EMERGENCIES ONLY, call 949-8177.

For more information, write the Superintendent, Padre Island National Seashore, 9405 S. Padre Island Dr., Corpus Christi, TX 78418, or call (512) 937-2621.

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